

Weekend MAGAZINE

SECTION

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WOMAN IN THE NEWS:

JACQUELINE KENNEDY

Behind the Legend, A Person

By HELEN DUDAR

The pedestal on which Jackie Kennedy has perched so magnificently is tottering and, any minute now, it could collapse completely.

—London Daily Express, Dec. 21 1966.

THE LIKELIHOOD of an unsightly legal contest in open court is fading; some of the offending passages will not see print, at least not until the pirated editions of "The Death of a President" with full texts begin to appear, and, finally, the pedestal still stands, perhaps slightly scuffed but far from collapse. Public monuments, after all, are built to last.

But for more than two weeks, fascinated multitudes all over the world have been reminded that the public monument is also a woman, that the fragile widow has an imperial will, that the symbol of the impeccable gesture is not entirely immune from blunder.

Despite the headlines proclaiming Jacqueline Kennedy the "winner" of those private editing sessions, the basic errors are irremediable. One was the failure to realize that any reconstruction of Dallas, Nov. 22, 1963, even one by a "hired" writer, would impinge on her "emotional privacy."

Another was an imperfect knowledge of the commercial value of everything to do with the assassination of John F. Kennedy.

A third was perhaps an unwillingness to recognize the obsessive character of the national preoccupation with that event. The day it was finished, William Manchester's manuscript acquired a life of its own.

One of the oddest aspects of the case was the way the opposition underestimated Mrs. Kennedy's stamina. No one apparently thought she would sue—not Manchester, who wrote the book, nor Harper & Row, where it was reportedly magnificently edited, nor Look magazine, where it was condensed. Yet, according to several editors who have read the manuscript, its dominant theme is the strength, unsuspected even by her closest friends, that enabled Mrs. Kennedy to confer that day of majestic pride on a shamed and grieving nation three years ago.

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The Manchester portrait of Mrs. Kennedy is far from idealized, one reader reports. The compromise cuts or revisions yet to be made on the book may well dilute it, but there is no question that Manchester has given her a dimension she has never before had in print.

"That glamorous, supremely stylish figure acquires a reality," said the source familiar with the book. "She is a woman with likes and dislikes. She



Post Photo by Enzel

is vain and generous, petty and noble, hysterical, and brave, helpless and tough. She is a person."

Among the details that stand out in this editor's recollections:

There is Jacqueline Kennedy taking a wifelike distaste for Texas Gov. John Connally, no great political admirer of her husband. They had been riding in limousines together through one Texas city after another, and she finds herself repelled by what she considers his weakly handsome face and conceit.

There is the dreadful irony of Jacqueline Kennedy sitting at a hotel dressing table wishing for rain. It is the morning of Nov. 22, nearly time to leave Fort Worth for Dallas, where there would be another motorcade in an open car, fresh winds to tousle her hair. A leaden sky would mean the bubbletop. The bubbletop would preserve her hair-do. It would have deflected the assassin's bullets. But the sun comes out—"Kennedy weather," the President's party calls it.

There is the almost unbearable image—apparently now cut from the manuscript—of Jacqueline Kennedy in the car in front of Parkland Hospital, her white-gloved hands cupped over Kennedy's shattered head. She knows then that he is dead, and she will not give him up. For long moments, the Secret Service men plead with her. Finally, one of them realizes she cannot bear to expose the mutilation to public gaze. He takes off his suit jacket, and Mrs. Kennedy tenderly wraps it around her husband's head.

From that moment on, Mrs. Kennedy is a numbed but almost always fully coherent spectator and participant. Standing in the hallway, she remembers to ask after the condition of the gravely wounded Connally. She fights her way past a nurse seeking to bar her from the Trauma Room where the vain effort to resuscitate the President is under way. She thanks and tenders a consoling gesture to the doctor who begins to cry after telling her the President is dead.

The purported anti-Johnson bias of the book has occupied a good deal of space in the last few days, but another reader reports that Manchester is at pains to point out that the new President was not

entirely a power-hungry boor. Nothing he did, Manchester suggests, would have appeased the grieving Kennedy party.

On the other hand, the second source reports, it is clear Mrs. Kennedy dislikes and distrusts him and cringes from his clumsy condolences. Lyndon Johnson, it appears, may be one of the few men in the world who does not understand that Jacqueline Kennedy would loathe being called "Honey."

Yet, two days later, sitting with the Johnsons in the limousine behind the caisson carrying Kennedy's body from the White House to the Capitol, listening to the mournful throb of draped drums, she could feel a wrench of pity for Johnson and suddenly tell him, "Oh, Lyndon, what an awful way for you to come in."

During those ceremonial days, the impression is created that Mrs. Kennedy functions as a sort of "superexecutive," whipping out details and plans for that remarkable funeral. She does not; she cannot. No single person can attend to all the minutiae of a state funeral. Friends and relatives do much of it. But she is firm and immovable about the details she wants and does not want.

She will not have the gaudy Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, the biggest Catholic church in the nation and the "logical" place for a Mass. She wants and gets St. Matthew's, a place of less spectacular splendor. Everyone else worries about the security problems created by her insistence on walking behind the caisson to the church. She walks and, perforce, so do aging, vulnerable world leaders who came to pay their respects.

When someone frets that a detail might be criticized, she says flatly, "Tell them I'm hysterical." There are periods when she is not far from hysteria, but with the exception of a moment during the funeral mass when she nearly loses control of her tears, it is never in public.

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Thirty-seven months after that day, Jacqueline Kennedy is still fighting to separate the public from the private aspects of her life, a feat for which she increasingly seems to rely on jet travel. Her Christmas week trip to Antigua on Monday will be her fifth long excursion this year. Last January, she skied in Switzerland; in April she visited an Argentine ranch; part of May was spent in Spain, and much of the summer was given to Hawaii.

In town or out, hers is a world of chic, elegance, culture and wealth. The Upper Fifth Av. apartment is elegantly furnished in antiques with such a devotion to French museum quality floor coverings that one stunned visitor once reported, "My dear, wherever you look, it's Aubusson, Aubusson, Aubusson."

Weekends, in season, she rides to hounds in Somerset, N.J., the location of her country place. Weekdays are dedicated, in part, to fun and games—for example, a visit to the theater with Hearst executive Kingsbury Smith, a night club date with Paul Mathias, a writer for Paris Match and a member of the family that publishes it, an evening at Coney Island with Mike Nichols, the director. She is said to talk more freely about romance and remarriage these days, but her public escorts seem to be carefully spaced to avoid stirring up gossip.

A determined avoider of committees in her White House years, Mrs. Kennedy more readily lends her name these days to an occasional public cause that interests her. She went along with the group fighting to save the old Metropolitan Opera from demolition and took the honorary chairmanship of the fund drive to rescue flood-damaged Italian art.

When she is in town, one afternoon a week is still spent at the four-room Park Av. office where a small staff, mostly voluntary, takes care of the mail. Sometimes she brings the children, Caroline, 9, and John Jr., 6, and they play while she sorts through items that have been sent for possible inclusion in the Kennedy Memorial Library to be built at Harvard.

Like her home, the office is a place of seclusion, safe from public curiosity, inaccessible unless opened from the inside, totally private.

On the next page, a portrait of William Manchester.